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AUTHOR Dilzer, Robert J., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Based on a National Council for the Social Studies position statement on the essentials of social studies, a rationale for teaching about religions in the social studies is presented. The author's rationale includes the following points: (1) that knowledge about religion is not only characteristic of an educated person but also necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity, (2) that knowledge of religious differences and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice, (3) that omitting study about religions gives students the impression that religion has not been and is not now a significant part of the human experience, and (4) that knowledge of the religious dimension of human history and culture is needed for a balanced and comprehensive education. Following the rationale, supporting statements by Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark in the case of "Abington versus Schempp" and the concurring opinion of Justice William Brennan are quoted. Fourteen guidelines for the study of religion, nine course objectives for a semester-length course entitled "Religions of Man," and a course outline are presented. Course topics include: introduction to religious studies, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and Shinto. A bibliography listing over 50 books, periodicals, filmstrips, slide presentations, and organizations dealing with religious studies concludes the paper. (LH)

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INCLUDING THE STUDY ABOUT RELIGIONS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM: A POSITION STATEMENT AND GUIDELINES

Robert J. Dilzer, Jr.

November 1984

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INCLUDING THE STUDY ABOUT RELIGIONS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM: A POSITION STATEMENT AND GUIDELINES

POSITION STATEMENT

The National Council for the Social Studies in its Statement On Essentials of the Social Studies declares that:

> Students need a knowledge of the world at large and the world at hand, the world of individuals and the world of institutions, the world past, the world present and future.[1]

Religions have influenced the behavior of both individuals and nations, and have inspired some of the world's most beautiful art, architecture, literature, and music. History, our own nation's religious pluralism, and contemporary world events are testimony that religion has been and continues to be an important cultural value. The NCSS Curriculum Guidelines state that "the social studies program should draw from currently valid knowledge representative of human experience, culture, and beliefs."[2] The study about religions, then, has "a rightful place in the public school curriculum because of the pervasive nature of religious beliefs, practices, institutions, and sensitivities."[3]

Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is also absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity. Knowledge of religious differences and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice. Since the purpose of the social studies is to provide students with a knowledge of the world that has been, the world that is, and the world of the future, studying about religions must be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Omitting study about religions gives students the impression that religions have not been and are not now part of the human experience. Study about religions may be dealt with in special courses and units or wherever and whenever knowledge of the religious

dimension of human history and culture is needed for a balanced and comprehensive understanding.

In its 1963 decision in the case of Abington v. Schempp, the United States Supreme Court declared that study about religions in the nation's public schools is both legal and desirable. Justice Tom Clark writing the majority opinion stated:

> "In addition, it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religions or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historical qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment."

Justice William Brennan in a concurring opinion wrote:

> "The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching about the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history. Indeed, whether or not the Bible is involved, it would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the social sciences or the humanities without some mention of religion."

If the public schools are to provide students with a comprehensive education in the social studies, academic study about religions must be a part of the curriculum.

Robert J. Dilzer, Jr., Chair
NCSS Religion and the Schools Committee, 1984

[1]Statement on Essentials of the Social Studies. Social Education. 45:3 March, 1981. p. 163.

[2]A Revision of the NCSS Social Studies Curriculum Guidelines. Social Education. 43:4 April, 1979. p. 268.

[3]Collie, William E., and Smith, Lee H. "Teaching About Religion in the Schools: The Continuing Challenge." Social Education. 45:1 January, 1981. p. 16.

GUIDELINES

1. Study about religions should strive for awareness and understanding of the diversity of religions, religious experiences, religious expressions, and the reasons for particular expressions of religious beliefs within a society or culture.

2. Study about religions should stress the influence of religions on history, culture, the arts, and contemporary issues.

3. Study about religions should permit and encourage a comprehensive and balanced examination of the entire spectrum of ideas and attitudes pertaining to religion as a component of human culture.

4. Study about religions should investigate a broad range, both geographic and chronological, of religious beliefs, practices, and values.

5. Study about religions should examine the religious dimension of human existence in its broader cultural context, including its relation to economic, political, and social institutions as well as its relation to the arts, language, and literature.

6. Study about religions should deal with the world's religions from the same perspective (i.e. beginnings, historical development, sacred writings, beliefs, practices, values, and impact on history, culture, contemporary issues, and the arts).

7. Study about religions should be objective.

8. Study about religions should be academic in nature, stressing student awareness and understanding, not acceptance and/or conformity.

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9. Study about religions should emphasize the necessity and importance of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding in a nation and world of diversity.

10. Study about religions should be descriptive, non-confessional, and conducted in an environment free of advocacy.

11. Study about religions should seek to develop and utilize the various skills, attitudes, and abilities that are essential to history and the social sciences (i.e. locating, classifying, and interpreting data; keen observation; critical reading, listening, and thinking; questioning; and effective communication).

12. Study about religions should be academically responsible and pedagogically sound, utilizing accepted methods and materials of the social sciences, history, and literature.

13. Study about religions should involve a range of materials that provide a balanced and fair treatment of the subject, and distinguish between confessional and historical fact.

14. Study about religions should be conducted by qualified and certified teachers selected for their academic knowledge, their sensitivity and empathy for differing religious points of view, and their understanding of the Supreme Court's decisions pertaining to religious practices and study about religions in the public schools.

1984 NCSS Religion and the Schools Advisory Committee

Robert J. Dilzer, Jr., Chair

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Religions of Man is a semester length course involving an analysis of the beginnings, historical development, sacred writings, values, beliefs and practices of the world's major religions. Special emphasis is given to the impact of religion on history, culture and the arts.

Course Objectives:

Through regular attendance, active participation in class recitation and discussion, the successful completion of homework assignments, and satisfactory performance on quizzes and examinations, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of man's religions by explaining:

1. the meaning of the word religion as an initial step toward an understanding of what values, beliefs and behaviors might be considered religious.

2. how religion studies helps one to understand people, nations and cultures.

3. the diversity of religions, religious experiences and religious expressions.

4. man's need for and uses of religion.

5. the beginnings, historical development, sacred writings, values, beliefs and practices of the world's major religions.

6. the influence of religion on history, culture and the arts.

7. that religion is an important cultural value whose effects have been felt throughout history and the world today.

8. the importance of objectivity, mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance for beliefs, values and practices of the world's religions.

9. the necessity of understanding the meaning of religious beliefs, values, and practices in order to both understand and respond in a proper and positive manner to these phenomena when encountered in everyday life.

The student should continue his/her development and utilization of the various skills, attitudes, and abilities that are essential to the social sciences (i.e. the location, classification, and interpretation of data; keen observation; critical reading, listening, thinking and questioning; and effective communication).

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Course Outline

I. Introduction to Religion Studies
   A. Definition of Religion
   B. Reasons for studying religions
   C. Diversity of religious experience and religious expression
   D. Sacred Places
   E. Sacred Times
   F. Man's need for religion and uses of religion

II. Judaism
   A. Basic terms and concepts
   B. History of Judaism
   C. Religious Calendar
   D. Religious Literature
   E. Basic beliefs and religious concepts
   F. The Sabbath
   G. Life-cycle rituals
   H. The synagogue and the rabbi
   I. Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform

III. Zoroastrianism: The Parsis

IV. Christianity
   A. Basic terms and concepts
   B. The life and teachings of Jesus
   C. History of Christianity
   D. Religious Calendar
   E. Religious Literature
   F. Basic beliefs and religious concepts
   G. The Sacraments
   H. Christian churches and Christian worship

V. Islam
   A. Basic terms and concepts
   B. The life and teachings of Mohammed
   C. History of Islam
   D. Religious Literature
   E. Basic beliefs and religious concepts
   F. The Five Pillars: the duties of Islam
   G. The structure of Islam

VI. Hinduism
   A. Basic terms and concepts
   B. The three paths to nirvana
   C. Hindu Literature
   D. Hindu values and ethics
   E. Hindu worship and religious festivals

VII. Buddhism
   A. Basic terms and concepts
   B. The life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama
   C. The Sangha
   D. Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism

VIII. Jainism and Sikhism

IX. Confucianism and Taoism

X. Shinto

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prepared by: Robert J. Dilzer, Jr.
1984 Chair, NCSS Religion and the Schools Advisory Committee
Newtown High School, Sandy Hook, Ct. 06482

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prepared by: Robert J. Dilzer, Jr.
1984 Chair, Religion and the Schools Advisory Committee (NCSS)
Newtown High School, Sandy Hook, Ct. 06482

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prepared by: Robert J. Dilzer, Jr.
1984 Chair, NCSS Religion and the Schools Advisory Committee
Newtown High School, Sandy Hook, Ct. 06482

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Wes Bodin and Lee Smith, Project Co-Directors
6425 West 33rd St.
Minneapolis, Mn. 55426

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION
Dr. Lynn Taylor, Executive Director
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

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